

7. A Note on *Heliodilus soumagnii*, Grandidier. By R. BOWDLER SHARPE, F.L.S., F.Z.S., &c., Department of Zoology, British Museum.

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The British Museum has recently acquired a skin of *Heliodilus soumagnii* from Mr. Higgins, of 22 Bloomsbury Street. This very interesting specimen, which I now exhibit, was obtained in the neighbourhood of Antananarivo, and formed part of the same small consignment as the new *Dromæocercus*, which also lies upon the table. The genus *Heliodilus* is of very great interest to ornithologists, as having formed the subject of an important communication by Prof. Alphonse Milne-Edwards to the French Academy ('Comptes Rendus,' Dec. 1877); and I have had great pleasure in receiving such a desideratum for our national collection, which gives me the opportunity of comparing together *Strix*, *Phodilus*, and *Heliodilus*.

In my 'Catalogue of Birds' (vol. ii. p. 289) I separated the *Strigidae* as a separate family from the *Bubonidae*, and included in the first-named family the Barn-Owls and the *Phodili*, reserving every other Owl for the family *Bubonidae*, which, of course, greatly predominates in number. I take the present opportunity of acknowledging an oversight, which was unintentional on my part; and that was, not to have mentioned in the 'Catalogue' that the institution of these two principal groups was derived from Messrs. Selater and Salvin's notes, as published in Professor Newton's edition of Yarrell's British Birds—a fact that should have been stated at the time.

In a previous communication made by Professor Alphonse Milne-Edwards to the French Academy of Sciences on Dec. 17, 1877, he shows that in the form of its sternum and in other peculiarities of the skeleton, *Phodilus* is one of the *Bubonidae*, and suggests that it comes near *Syrnium*. It is curious that every author has placed the genus near the Barn-Owls, to which the form of the facial disk and the red plumage somewhat assimilate it. On reexamining our specimen of *Phodilus*, I also perceive that an important external character, the serration of the inner edge of the middle claw, is wanting; and thereby further evidence is afforded of the correctness of Prof. Milne-Edwards's remarks. From the shape of its nostril, ear-conch, and facial disk, the genus *Phodilus* appears to be nearly allied to *Scops*.

The new genus *Heliodilus* looks at first sight very much like *Phodilus*, as the typical species *H. soumagnii* is a red bird of the general aspect of the Bay Owl (*Phodilus badius*). On a more careful examination, however, the bird will be found to possess the serrated claw of a Barn-Owl; and this, with the careful description of the osteology given by Professor Milne-Edwards, conclusively shows that the family of the Barn-Owls, reduced to a single genus *Strix* by the abduction of its time-honoured ally *Phodilus*, ought to be compensated for the loss by the addition of the still more remarkable *Heliodilus*.

In external appearance *Heliodilus* is very similar to *Strix*, but has the toes almost perfectly bare, without any of the hairs which are found on the feet of a Barn-Owl. A more important difference is exhibited in the shape of the wings in the two genera, which may be thus diagnosed :—

- a.* Wings very long, surpassing the end of the tail. *Strix*.
b. Wings shorter and much more concave, falling short of the tail
 by as much as the length of the outer toe and claw. *Heliodilus*.

The following is a description of the specimen in the British Museum :—

Genus *HELIODILUS*.

Heliodilus, Alph. Milne-Edwards, C. R. 1877, Type.
 (Dec.) *H. soumagnii*.
Range. Confined to Madagascar.

HELIODILUS SOUMAGNII.

Heliodilus soumagnii, Grandid. Bull. Soc. Philom. Paris (7), ii. p. 66 ; id. C. R. 1877 (Dec. 31).

Adult. General colour above bright cinnamon-rufous, slightly varied with scantily distributed blackish spots, very small, of an arrow-head shape, and varying in number from two to five, the sub-terminal one alone being distinct ; head and mantle a little more closely spotted than the rest of the upper surface, with the exception of the inner greater coverts and inner secondaries ; wings cinnamon-rufous, with faintly indicated black bars on some of the greater coverts, the quills are regularly banded with black on their inner webs ; tail light cinnamon-rufous, crossed with narrow and incomplete black bars, of which six can be noted, without including a triangular black spot near the end of the tail ; a complete ruff of deep-cinnamon feathers, with buffy-white bases to the feathers ; facial disk deep vinaceous, lighter on the lower margin, where the feathers are fulvous on their bases ; entire under surface of body light cinnamon, uniform, with the exception of small dusky spots on the fore neck and chest, with here and there a spot on the flanks and under wing-coverts, which are deep cinnamon ; quills pale cinnamon below, with bars of black on the inner webs ; leg-feathers deep cinnamon-rufous, extending down the entire hind leg, and becoming more and more scanty on the fore part of the tarsus just above the toes ; bill ivory white, the lower mandible yellower. Total length 12·8 inches, culmen 1·45, wing 8·5, tail 4·1, tarsus 2·1.

Hab. Neighbourhood of Antananarivo and Tamatave (*Mus. Paris*), Madagascar.